

Sport, games and chivalry in medieval Serbia

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Summary:

Sports games held during the ancient times were an important factor that influenced the entire social life of the era. During the greatest sport events such as the Olympic Games, all hostilities and war conflicts ceased and the winners of the games were considered to be equal to gods. Although developed on the foundations of the Greek culture and Roman state, the Middle Ages, under the influence of Christianity, banned the Olympics considering them a pagan relic, making most sports undesirable. The invasion of barbarians, which destroyed the remnants of the old society, accelerated this process. Yet, not all sports activities died out. The ones related to everyday activities, fighting and warfare continued to live. Serbian medieval state originated in the area between Byzantium and Western Europe and was exposed to influences from both sides, both the East and West. These influences were also manifested in sports, games and chivalry. The influences' paths varied, though, and were connected to population's travelling and mixing. Thus, the Eastern influence came from the Byzantine neighboring cities, and the Western from the Westerners – the Sas (Saxon) miners who worked and lived in Serbia, merchants and craftsmen from the coastal region, as well as mercenary military squads hired by the rulers. Sports activities, games and knightly competitions in medieval Serbia were connected with other social events and could be found in mixed environment such as urban settlements, as well as at gatherings at certain religious buildings. Gatherings in the cities were connected with organization of trade fairs and trade shows, and at monasteries and churches with religious festivals held almost every day. Preserved onomastic materials testify about sports activities: igrište (arena), potecište (starting point), strelište (shooting range) and others. Sports activities and knightly competitions were of a competitive nature, whereas the games were for fun. The paper discusses the presence of sports activities, games and chivalry in medieval Serbia, their origin, venues and social significance.

Keywords: Serbia, Middle Ages, sports, games, chivalry, influences, fairs, festivals, cities.